

FATE'S ASSISTANT

What Happened in the Love Affairs of a
Young Couple When an Outsider Took a Hand

By CAROLYN WELLS



Miss Fairfield Waited Also

OF course, in a way, the responsibility was entirely on the head of the head waiter. After Grace Fairfield had decided to eat lunch, alone as she was, at Delmonico's, she walked in bravely, and with a somewhat overacted *sang froid*. But, immediately conscious of the many casual glances cast at her, she became embarrassed, lost her way among the jungle of beflowered tables, and threw herself helplessly, though metaphorically, upon the dignified mercy of the head waiter. That omnipotent being seated her pleasantly, whisked some table paraphernalia about, flourished a lithographed menu at her, and departed.

By this time Miss Fairfield had recovered her equanimity, and proved it by raising and adjusting her white veil without even glancing toward the mirror-lined walls. Then she removed her gloves, and glancing about her, gave a little sigh of satisfaction. Grace Fairfield dearly loved to look at her fellow-women. In accordance with the law of compensation, her fellow-men dearly loved to look at her; but that doesn't affect this yarn.

As the restaurant was crowded with fascinating femininity, Miss Fairfield foresaw an hour or two of genuine pleasure. She loved to study the faces, gowns, hats and manners of those about her, for no especial reason save an impersonal interest in properly conducted humanity. If scraps of their conversation came to her ears, she listened unashamed, for secrets should not be told in public places. Satisfied that she herself was not the object of undue notice, she calmly ordered her luncheon, and then gazed about the room, absorbed in the moving picture.

Owing to the position of a huge pillar, the table next her own was unusually near. It was occupied by two white-clad young women, who, like Miss Fairfield, had evidently come in from some summer resort for a short day in the city. Even had Grace been so minded, she could scarcely have avoided hearing their conversation; but being at once interested in their appearance, she made no effort to exclude their voices.

"You see, Eglantine," one of the girls said to the other, and at this Grace Fairfield's scruples, if she had had any, would have vanished—a girl who permitted herself to be called "Eglantine" was entitled to no consideration of any sort.

"She's a perfect wreck," went on the high-pitched though not overloud voice of the girl with the leghorn hat. "At least, she was until I talked to her this morning. I do believe I did her good. I said: 'Florence, you're a perfect little fool! You play fast and loose with him and tease him to the very limit, then you expect he's going to follow you round and hang onto your apron-string.' Why, last night at the hop she flirted fearfully with every man there. I wouldn't stand it, if I was Dick Hamilton."

"He isn't going to stand it," said the girl who

had been called Eglantine. "I know something about that affair myself."

"I know too," eagerly broke in the other. "Florence told me all about it this morning. They had a fearful fuss last night, just before the hop broke up, and Mr. Hamilton told her she'd got to say 'Yes' or 'No'—he wouldn't be kept dangling on a string any longer. Of course he didn't use those words, but he just gave Florence Vail to understand that it was her last chance at him."

"What did she say?"

"Why, the goose said 'No.' She is so sure of him, you know, and she's such a born coquette, that she told him if it must be either, it must be 'No.' And then the little idiot went home and cried all night because she had said it, and she's going to ask him to go driving with her this afternoon and tell him she's changed her mind—or at least give him a chance to find it out."

"She is! is she?" said Eglantine. "Well, I guess she isn't! Florence Vail has lost Dick Hamilton for good this time."

"Why, Mabel, what do you mean?"

Eglantine's face expressed intense interest; but, had the speakers noticed it, so also did Grace Fairfield's. She neglected her soft-shell crabs in her anxiety to hear the rest of the story, but she was careful to preserve an effect of absorption in her own thoughts and indifference to all about her.

"Just this," said Mabel, and a hint of spiteful satisfaction rang in her tone: "I sat with Roger Hall coming in on the train this morning. He's at the Harper House, where I am, you know, and that's where Mr. Hamilton has been staying too. Well, Roger says that Mr. Hamilton is going to India, and that he's going to-day."

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"India? What in the world for?"

"Oh, his excuse is that he's going to hunt first editions of Kipling—he's a book-fiend, you know—but really, Roger says, he's going because Florence Vail refused him."

"Oh, what a lovely mess!" exclaimed Eglantine, and despite her urban appearance she showed all the unction of a village gossip.

"Yes, isn't it?" assented Mabel. "And it serves her right. Florence Vail thinks she owns all the men at Sea Ridge and most of the other places on Long Island; and I'm just glad she's lost the one she likes best!"

"Oh, I don't know; Florence is a dear in some ways. You know we've been together at the Ocean Swell all summer, and I've seen a lot of her. She is a flirt, but she doesn't really care for anybody but Dick Hamilton."

"Well, then she should have treated him differently. She'll never see him again, unless she goes to the dock this afternoon to see the Bouvardia sail."

"The Bouvardia? That doesn't go to India."

"No, he's going to London first, then on to India from there. Roger told me so."

"I think it's too bad," said Mabel. "I've a notion to go right back to Sea Ledge and tell Florence he's going. I'd like her to have a chance to do something."

"What could she do? It's two o'clock now, and the steamer sails this afternoon, probably about three. Don't be silly, it's none of your affair."

"No, but I like Florence better than you do, and I'm sorry for her."

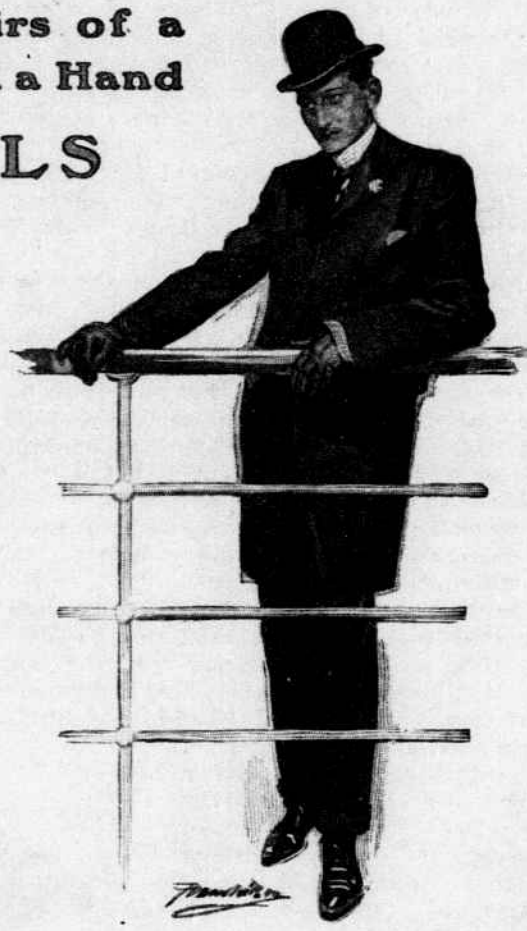
"Well, I'm not. She deserves all she's getting. Don't you want a Melba peach?"

"No, I want that big tray of sweets, and then we'll pick out what looks the flummiest."

"All right, we'll have that. And we must hurry a little, for I have to be at the tailor's at half-past two."

Grace Fairfield was thinking. Her interest in the two girls she had overheard talking had dwindled away, and her thoughts were all of the unfortunate Florence, and, to her mind, the no less unfortunate Dick. It was absurd of course, but she felt as if she must do something in the matter. To think that Fate was taking swift steps to part two loving hearts, and that she, Grace Fairfield, knew of something that could bring them together, if only circumstances would allow!

With her mind full of half-formed intentions, she



Grace Felt It Was Dick Hamilton

called for her bill. As she dipped her finger-tips in water, her plans seemed to materialize, and as she drew on her gloves her face beamed with a glad determination. So eager was she to begin her campaign against Fate that she impatiently waited for her change. When it was brought, she picked up the coins, gave the waiter a rather larger tip than usual, with an undefined sense of bidding for luck, and started blithely off.

A moment's pause at a news-stand, and then her goal was a public-telephone station, where she was not known, but where there was a comfortable booth. After consulting the book, she called up the Ocean Swell at Sea Ledge, Long Island, and asked for Miss Florence Vail.

After the irritating necessary delay, this conversation took place:

"Is this Miss Florence Vail?"

"Yes."

"Are you in a booth, or can other people hear you talk?"

"I am in a closed booth. Who is this, please?"

"Never mind my name. I am a humble instrument of Fate. If you keep your head, think quickly and act quickly. I can help you to secure the happiness you want most. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you perfectly; but I can't imagine what this is all about."

"There isn't time to explain. Now listen, and don't faint. Dick Hamilton sails for India this afternoon."

"What? Who are you?"

"I'm Fate, I tell you! Now, keep still. He's going because you refused him last night. Do you want to marry him?"

"Yes, I do. I was a fool!"

"You were, indeed. Now, if you want to counteract your foolishness, there's only one way to do it, and that is to meet Mr. Hamilton at the steamer and tell him so."

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"I will, I will! But how can I?"

"I don't know how you can, but if you want to do it, you must find a way. Can't anybody come with you? Your mother?"

"I haven't any mother. Oh, who are you?"

"Hush! What have you—a father, a chaperon?"

"My father is in New-York. His office is in the Townsend Building."

"That will do. You must take the three o'clock train from Sea Ledge. You'll get in New-York at three-forty-five. Take a cab and rush like fury. Stop for your father—he'll be ready for you—and then drive like mad to the pier. The Bouvardia sails at five, and you ought to be there by half-past four. Now, scoot! Good-bye."

Miss Fairfield rang off, and once more studied the telephone book. She had meant to ask Miss Vail her father's name, but in the excitement of the occasion had forgotten to do so. However, there was only one Vail in the Townsend Building,

so that made it easy, and she called up his number.

"Is this Mr. Valentine Vail?" she inquired politely.

"Yes," was the reply. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm a friend of Florence's," said Miss Fairfield glibly, "and she wants me to ask you to wait for her. She'll be at your office at about four o'clock, and she wants you to go with her on an errand, a most important errand."

"H'm. To pick out a set of furs, I suppose. She remarked this morning that summer was the time to buy them. Well, whatever Flossie says goes. I'll be here."

"All right, good-by," and again she rang off.

Her work was now done. Surely after such assistance those two foolish young people could get together? But it seemed so tame to drop the matter and prosaically take her own train back to Stamford, Connecticut. She wished she could talk with Hamilton. It was absurd, of course, and she had no intention of doing it, but it would do no harm to see if by any chance he was in the telephone book. She found two Richard Hamiltons, and merely because she couldn't bear to stop the fun she concluded to try them.

The first one she called proved to be a most ill-mannered man, and she rang off hastily. The next time a subordinate answered, who told her that Hamilton had left the office and gone to his apartment. She inquired the address of Hamilton's rooms and said good-by. Then she called up the bachelor apartment-house. Here a rather curt clerk consented to make inquiries, and finally informed her that Hamilton had gone to his club.

Grace Fairfield's mood had changed. From a spirit of reckless daring, she had passed to that of dogged persistence. Richard Hamilton must be found! She had put Florence Vail in a miserable position, otherwise, and she must rescue her. After trying two clubs in vain, she tried a third and was told that Hamilton had been there but had just gone out.

In despair, Grace cried out: "Oh, isn't there anybody there who can tell me where he went?"

Perhaps the emotion in her voice touched the heart of the statue-like servant who was answering her call, but at any rate he asked a passing club-member, who was a friend of Hamilton's, if he would take the receiver. And so, when Grace cried again: "Can't you, please, tell me where to find Mr. Hamilton?" a kind voice replied: "Why, yes; he has just gone around to Mrs. Lyons on Fifth-ave."

"Is there a telephone there?" inquired Grace breathlessly.

"No, I don't think so. No, I'm sure there isn't. Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes. Go and tell him—no, go and ask him to telephone me—no, that won't do. Will you please go and get him, and bring him to this telephone? Go quickly! It's a matter of life—" Her unknown friend had apparently gone; so she waited for ten minutes, and then called up the club again. Hamilton had not yet returned. Would she give her telephone number? She would not, but would repeat her call later. It was now after four, but her next call brought her success at last.

"Is this Mr. Richard Hamilton?" she asked in a voice weak with excitement and exhaustion.

"Yes. Did you wish to speak with me?"

"I do. And I've no time for unnecessary words. Are you going to India?"

"Yes."

"Are you sailing on the Bouvardia this afternoon?"

"No, I've changed my plans and am going—"

"Oh, I don't care when you're going! Wait a minute. If Florence Vail would marry you, would you go at all?"

"Excuse me, madam—"

"Answer my question! Would you?"

"Well, not alone."

"Then listen. Florence Vail thinks you're sailing on the Bouvardia, and she's now—now on her

way there to tell you—well, to tell you she doesn't want you to go—without her."

"What? Miss Vail on her way to the pier? Is she sailing?"

"No, stupid! She thinks you are. Oh, how dense men can be! But never mind; you must go there at once and head her off—and listen! You must let her think you're sailing on that steamer, or she'd never forgive herself or you for her going there."

"Is she alone?"

"No, Mr. Vail is with her. Now, fly! But mind, you must let her think you intended sailing, and her coming made you change your mind. Can you do that?"

"You bet I can! But whom am I to thank for this information and advice?"

"Fate. Now run as fast as you can. Good-by!"

Fairly trembling with the emotions of the moment, Grace left the booth, paid her not inconsiderable bill, and crossing the street, revived her exhausted nature with an ice-cream soda.

"I've made a mess of it," she soliloquized. "I needn't have spoken to Florence or her father at all. If I'd hunted up Mr. Hamilton first and told him how matters stood, it would have done just as well. But I couldn't know that, and anyway, if he had been going Florence couldn't have made the train, if I'd waited any later. Well now, I'm going to that boat myself."

Feeling like a heroine in a magazine story, Grace hailed a hansom and drove to the pier

sion on the young man's face that some one he knew was arriving. Following his glance, she saw a fine-looking middle-aged man helping a girl from a cab. Grace hadn't the slightest doubt as to the identity of these people, and in ten seconds she had noted every detail of Florence Vail's appearance.

She saw a pretty, vivacious girl, with a roguish, wilful face and a fascinating smile. The dainty costume of white embroidered linen and the black hat with plumes met with Grace's entire approval, and she breathed a sigh of relief that her beneficiaries were such proper people.

Then she looked back at Dick Hamilton, and was amazed at the change in his demeanor. His eager alertness was all gone, and he leaned against a pillar in an attitude of hopeless dejection. Grace almost burst into laughter, as she suddenly realized that the young man was merely acting his part. She had told him over the telephone to pretend that he was about to sail, and of course Florence must find him properly despondent. With bowed head and folded arms, Hamilton (for Grace felt convinced it was he) stood, looking like a man whose last earthly hope has departed. Although careful to avoid any appearance of recognition, Grace drew nearer to him and waited.

In a moment Florence and her father approached. Breathlessly, Grace watched the meeting, and unashamed of her eavesdropping, listened for words that would prove the identity of the actors in her

little drama. From the look on Florence's face, Grace saw that she was deeply touched at Dick's evident misery.

A moment more and a white-gloved hand was laid gently on the big gray suede one, and a girl's voice said softly: "Dick!"

With an admirable start of surprise, the man looked up from his reverie, and exclaimed: "Florence! Why are you here?"

Grace could have embraced them both, in sheer joy at the success of her plan, and also in admiration of Hamilton's acting.

Vail, who had doubtless been coached by his daughter, stepped aside a little and seemed interested in watching the crowds of people.

"I came to tell you good-by," said Florence. She spoke so low that Grace was obliged to edge up a little nearer, but she knew she was in no danger of being recognized, and too, the lovers were already oblivious to the fact that there was anyone else on the boat but themselves.

"After your good-by of last evening, another was hardly necessary," said Dick.

"That's right," said Grace to herself. "Give it to her; she's a naughty little coquette."

"I wanted to say too," went on Florence, stammering a little, "that—that I'm sorry you're going."

"That alters the case," cried Dick, and a light came into his eyes as he grasped both the little white-gloved hands. "Listen, Florence, the boat sails in a few minutes, and we've no time to waste. If I postpone this trip and go later in the season, will you go with me? Will you, love?"

"Yes," said Florence, with such an adorable glance at the big man that Grace wondered how he refrained from catching her in his arms.

But he only said: "Come on then, my girl. Let's get out of this, quick. Where's your father?"

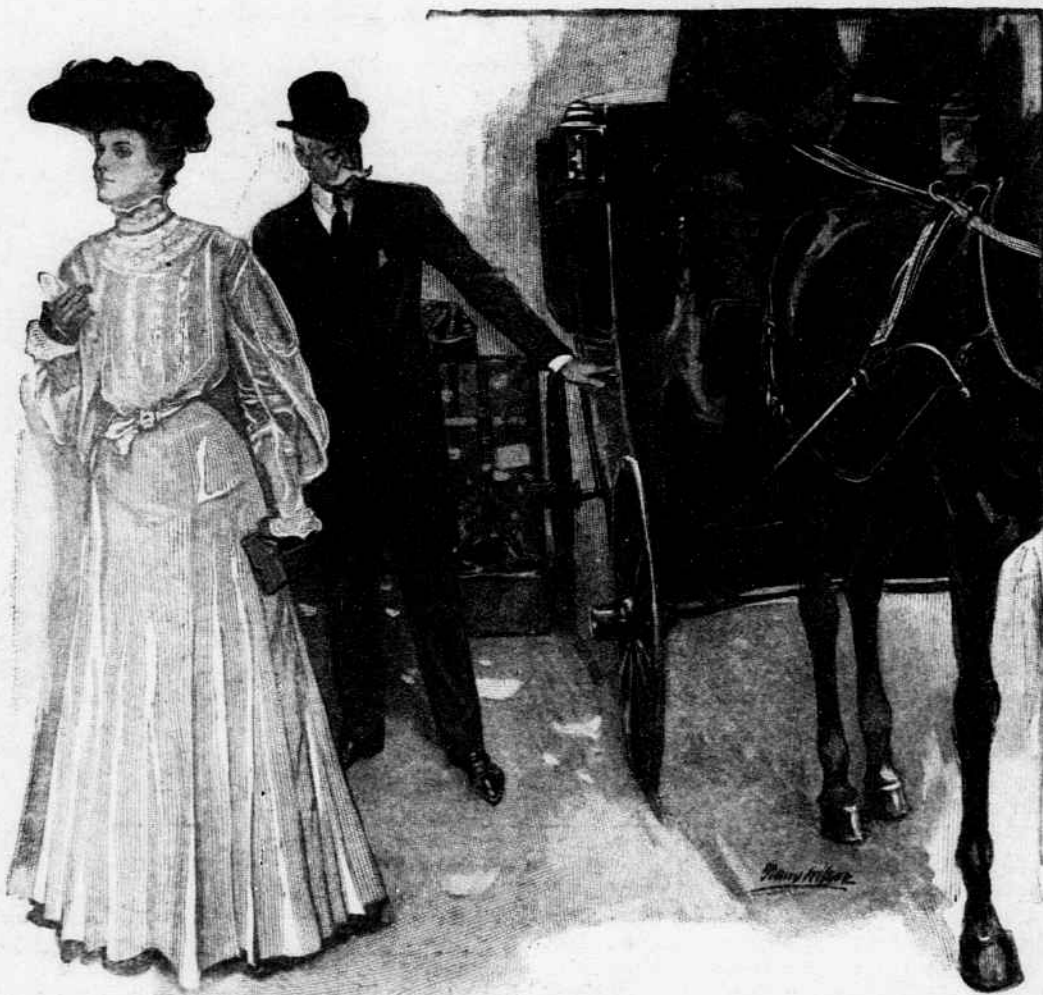
"But," said Florence, "don't you have to see about your luggage and your ticket?"

"Oh—er—yes. Well, you stay here with your father. Don't move, now; stay right in this place, and I'll go and order my things sent back, and I'll get my—er—ticket extended." From the difficulty he seemed to find in making these prevarications, Grace judged that young Hamilton was ordinarily a truthful man.

He soon returned, and they started merrily away.

Grace followed and saw the two get into a four-wheeler as she climbed into her own hansom.

On a sudden impulse she pulled off one of her own dainty oxfords, and as her cab passed Florence's she tossed the shoe in at the window, crying: "Fate's congratulations and good luck!" Then she said to her driver: "To Blank's shoe-shop, as fast as you can!"



Her Beneficiaries Were Such Proper People

Bidding the cabman wait for her, she went aboard the Bouvardia.

But the crowd was so great, and it was so difficult to tell the passengers from their friends, that she couldn't feel sure which were the actors in her own particular little comedy. Several times she noted eager, alert young men dash across the gang-plank, but they either disappeared or conducted themselves in such a manner that she knew none of them could be Hamilton; and there were dozens of couples who might have been Florence and her father.

But at last a young man came on board who, Grace intuitively felt, was Dick Hamilton himself. He was of a large, handsome type, and in his correct afternoon dress didn't have at all the appearance of a departing tourist. Grace fancied she could see in his face a mingled expression of happiness and uncertainty, and she watched him closely as he made a quick and systematic survey of the crowd on deck. At last he apparently satisfied himself that the object of his search hadn't yet arrived, and selecting a spot from which he could see all who approached, he stood calmly by the rail, waiting. Whereupon, Miss Fairfield selected a position near him, and without looking his way waited also.

It was not long before she saw by the expres-